Children learn to deal with loss of loved ones

Camp Lloyd offers therapeutic play and support

By Danielle Urbina
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Camp Lloyd, which once was jokingly referred to as "the camp with no name," has become a well known bereavement camp for children throughout Green Bay.

Ellen Cupit, a human development professor at the University of Wisconsin-Green Bay, started the effort to help young people grieve the loss of loved ones with a small, half-day camp made up of nine campers. This year, 49 campers attended.

 Held at the Mauhtie Center on the UW-Green Bay campus, the camp offers support for children by providing activities and positive interactions with peers as well as Camp Lloyd volunteers, known as "buddies."

"Because it is a grief camp, the whole idea about working with grief in children is what you call therapeutic play," Cupit said. "So, a lot of their processing of their loss experiences happen within the context of play, so we do a lot of your traditional camp activities."

While most of the activities are traditionally summer camp-related, Cupit incorporates activities that help campers talk about loss.

"One of the things that the kids do is they build a memory box. A memory box is a special box where you could put your treasured items from a loved one who has died," she said.

Byron Cumicke, a four-year attendee of Camp Lloyd, pointed out the memory box she decorated this week that would hold special memories of her late sister.

"I'm going to put headbands and pictures of my sister in there," said Cumicke.

Campers also sat and played with therapy dogs from Compassionate Canines Inc. Interactions with the therapy dogs serve as a natural activity that help open up the campers to talking to each other.

Head counselor Lauren Vieux said one of the most important parts of Camp Lloyd is getting children to open up in "healing circles" while constantly reminding them that they are in a safe place.

"On one day we'll do sharing your story, sharing who you lost and how you lost them — if you're comfortable with that. And that kind of opens it up right away and that's really when the kids realize that they're not alone," Vieux said. After two days at Camp Lloyd, Claudia Fritsche said she realized it was not a place where she would cry all the time, and she instead made friends who understood her grief.

"I've met a couple of girls and they are the same age as me and that really helps me because they kind of understand what I am going through and it's a different point of view," Fritsche said. "I feel like I can tell them anything, and they will understand and not judge me."

For many of Camp Lloyd's participants, the experience is life changing and keeps campers and student interns coming back year after year.

"I think it's really important for these kids to have something because there isn't really anything like this out there," Vieux said. "We really focus on reminding the kids that it's OK to have fun, even if you have lost someone."

For more photos of therapy dogs interacting with children at Camp Lloyd, click on this story at www.greenbaypressgazette.com.

PHOTOS ONLINE

Flora Kouvarakis and Jackson Melotte play Thursday with therapy dog Penny, part of a Camp Lloyd activity at the Mauhtie Center at UWGB.